Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes
Canada

News Release

January 13, 1995

CRTC SETS TOUGH ANTI-VIOLENCE RULES FOR VIDEO GAMES ON CABLE

OTTAWA/HULL -- The CRTC today announced that operators of video games programming services delivered by cable TV will not require licences provided they meet a number of key criteria, including adherence to the private broadcasting industry's violence code (Public Notice CRTC 1995-5). Today's majority decision follows a two-phase CRTC public consultation process.

This decision does not mean the CRTC is promoting video games; it is merely a recognition that they are now a popular part of our entertainment mix. The CRTC's criteria provide a reasonable means of protecting children, while respecting the public's right to have access to these types of services. In fact, children already have wide access to video games, even the most violent ones, which they can rent or buy with few restrictions.

The Commission believes that by allowing video games services to be delivered by cable, we can ensure that parents have a much less violent alternative from which to choose. That is why the CRTC built in a number of safeguards that cable-delivered games services must respect if they want to do business without detailed regulation and a licence.

While the CRTC will deal with public complaints on a case-by-case basis, it hopes that operators of video games services will choose to join the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), which already handles public complaints concerning private broadcasters under the industry's self-regulatory codes.

The exemption criteria put in place today by the CRTC include:

- the programming must comply with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' self-regulatory codes on TV violence, sex-role portrayal, and advertising to children;
- each video game being offered must be rated and information must be provided to subscribers of the service indicating, at a minimum, the game's suitability for use by children and adolescents;
- the programming must originate in Canada and the undertaking must make the greatest practicable use of Canadian creative and other resources;
- the service cannot run advertising, except for promotional material concerning the service itself and promotional material for the supplier's video games which meet the criteria for distribution on the service;
- no programming of a religious or political nature may be broadcast;
- exempted services must be at least 80% Canadian owned, the same as any service that holds a broadcasting licence in Canada.

Cable licensees may distribute the video games services of exempted undertakings without further authorization.

Alternatively, should a cable licensee propose to originate a video games service as a special programming service offered to its subscribers, it may apply for a licence amendment authorizing it to do so. The cable system would generally be required to meet, among other things, the same criteria as those outlined above.

In today's public notice, the CRTC notes that Sega of Canada Inc., which has indicated its desire to offer a video games service, has already introduced an independent video game classification system; committed to age-specific classifications; has helped establish a fully-Canadian rating council whose members include industry players such as Nintendo of Canada Ltd.; implemented toll-free lines and other initiatives to provide parents with easy access to information on the content of its video games; and committed to comply with the Canadian private broadcasting industry's self-regulatory codes.

In addition, Sega indicated that consumers would have to rent or purchase a special channel adapter (DRAM cartridge), which includes a Vchip allowing parents to pre-select which type of games enter their home. This is tied to Sega's **Password for Parents** initiative, by which parents could use a four-digit personal identification number (PIN) to set the appropriate rating level for their home. The CRTC expects all cable video games services to provide similar child-protection features.

The first level of control for parents is when they make the decision to subscribe to this type of service, which could range from $12 to $20 per month as a premium pay TV offering. They would then also have to decide to purchase or rent the equipment needed to access it.

In deciding whether or not to offer a video games service, cable television companies with more than 6,000 subscribers will be bound by the Canadian Cable Television Association's (CCTA) access commitment. This guarantees priority on their systems for all authorized Canadian pay television and specialty services. This means distribution of a video games service could not prevent a Canadian pay TV or specialty service from having a channel on the cable system. The Commission also expects smaller cable TV systems to give the same priority to these services.

Commissioners Spicer, Dawley and Ross dissented on today's ruling.

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Contact: Bill Allen, Director
CRTC Public Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2
Tel: 819-997-0313, TDD: 819-994-0423, Fax: 819-994-0218

Copies of today's decision are available through the public examination room at any of the following CRTC offices:

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